

With Compts.

Hospitals and Doctors



AN ADDRESS

Delivered at the Parish Church (St. Margaret's),
Barking, Essex, on Hospital Sunday,
June 19th, 1927

BY

C. O. HAWTHORNE, M.D.

LONDON

JOHN BALE, SONS & DANIELSSON, LTD.

88-91, GREAT TITCHFIELD STREET, W.1.

—
1927

WELLCOME
LIBRARY

General Collections

P

2037



22502802072

Hospitals and Doctors

TO-DAY is Hospital Sunday, 1927, and it brings to me the somewhat embarrassing duty of speaking about hospitals and about doctors from a quite unaccustomed platform.

With Hospital Sunday itself, as a proper and praiseworthy annual festival, no one, I imagine, will find cause of quarrel; indeed, it is generally allowed to be a seemly thing that on one selected Sunday in the year the attention of congregations in various places of worship should be directed to the existence of our voluntary hospitals, to the valuable work and social service which these institutions undertake, and to their reasonable claims for interest and co-operation and support.

I am, however, by no means sure that everyone will approve a development of Hospital Sunday that removes a medical practitioner from the modest obscurity of the bedside and places him in a prominent and unaccustomed position where he can neither be challenged nor contradicted. Moreover, the pulpit has its embarrassments for those untrained in its service, nor are these sensibly lessened even when the speaker is assured that his duty is not to preach a sermon but merely to deliver an address. In any event, these are the instructions I have received from your vicar, and I am therefore here to speak about hospitals and about doctors; and of course, briefly, in accordance with well-established pulpit tradition.

First, I would remind you that there is a long historical connection between religious organizations and the

practice of the art of healing, for the earliest arrangements made for the collective reception of the sick were organized in connection with temples, and the earliest physicians were priests. Again, every religion, I imagine, teaches with greater or less emphasis the duty of self-denial and of consideration for others, and especially of consideration for the unfortunate. More particularly is this true of a religion which proclaims that all men are brethren, and which sets in prominence the appealing parable of the Good Samaritan. Thus, by informing and moving the public conscience the Churches have had a large influence in the creation and development of our modern hospital system; and the hospital chaplain of to-day has a place of ministry and of service in the hospital wards, even as have the physician and the surgeon and the nurse.

Next, I wish to say something about "hospital" as a name or word, for it has a long and interesting history, and with this history its modern use and application are associated. To go back then to what is perhaps the beginning, I remind you that the Latin word for a guest was *hospes*, from which manifestly we derive our English word hospitality. Similarly, in ancient Rome, that part of a private house devoted to the reception and entertainment of guests—the guest-chamber—was named the *hospitium*. Then in days when bands or trains of pilgrims—usually urged by a religious motive, as in the Crusades—moved about the country, and even passed from one country to another, it became necessary to organize some accommodation for them in the various towns through which they passed. This want was met by the development of a public *hospitium* or guest-house. Inevitably some of the pilgrims would fall sick, and these would necessarily be detained, and sometimes for long periods, in the public guest-house. When new pilgrims arrived there might be on their part a not unnatural objection to be housed with persons suffering from disease, and thus, at least in some places, there arose two forms of public accommodation, namely, the *hostel* for the reception of the healthy, and the *hospital* for the

accommodation of the sick, both one and the other being an expression of public or communal hospitality.

There are two other related words familiar to us, namely, *hospice* and *hotel*. The first of these, that is, hospice, you recognize as generally applied to a house of shelter for travellers and organized by a body of monks, as, for example, the Hospice of St. Bernard, where travellers attempting the dangerous passes of the Alps find a welcome. Hotel is a term also implying hospitality, but, at least in this country, it implies hospitality only for those who are able and willing to pay the reckoning.

The inter-relation between these four terms—hospital, hostel, hospice, hotel—is further illustrated by their varying and somewhat indiscriminate use in different countries. Thus, in France, *hôtel* means a private palatial residence where, presumably, there are abundant facilities for the entertainment of guests; or it is applied to the house where official hospitality is dispensed—the Town Hall or *Hôtel de Ville*. Yet in Paris, and in other towns in France also, there is for the reception and treatment of sick persons an institution which is called, not *hôpital* but *hôtel*, namely, the *Hôtel Dieu*, that is, God's Hotel. And similarly, in our own country, the wider and more comprehensive sense of the word "hospital" is illustrated by the existence of such ancient foundations as Christ's Hospital or the Bluecoat School, the Foundling Hospital, Heriot's Hospital in Edinburgh, and Hutcheson's Hospital in Glasgow, each of these being an institution, not for the reception and treatment of sick persons, but for the reception and education of healthy children. In more modern days institutions of this order are being termed not hospitals (for this word has been specialized to a particular use) but Homes, as, for example, Dr. Barnardo's Home and the National Home for Children. That is to say, that just as the word *hospitium*, originally meaning a private guest-chamber, became applied to a public guest-house, so the term Home, having originally, and still possessing generally, a private and domestic significance, is being extended

to certain public or quasi-public institutions. In short, a word meaning primarily a shelter for the private and natural family is becoming applied to institutions where there is shelter for what may be termed a public or communal family.

From this rather long story we arrive at the suggestion that the motive or idea underlying the word hospital is hospitality—the reception and entertainment of guests. But if there are guests to be received and entertained there must be hosts able and willing to receive and entertain them. Now the guests we know: they are sick and injured folk who, in consequence either of lack of means or lack of accommodation, cannot receive the medical and surgical treatment they require in their own homes. Who then are the hosts? The immediate hosts are manifestly the members of the Committees of Management of the Hospitals. We do not hear very much about these members of committees. They acquire little glory; they receive little advertisement; and they certainly draw no salaries. Yet they undertake very important work, for on them rests the responsibility of collecting or otherwise providing the money necessary to pay the hospital bills; on them, too, rests the general policy and ordering of the hospitals. That is to say, there are devoted men and women who meet together weekly to discuss and to consider the interests of the sick guests they have received into the hospitals. We say, and say quite rightly, that the hospitals are supported by voluntary contributions. When we do this, let us not forget the willing and unpaid services of those who give time and ability and judgment to make and keep efficient the institutions where our sick and suffering brethren find hospitality and succour and help.

One of my objects here to-day is to remind you that you also may take a share in the hospitable reception and care of the sick guests in our hospitals; that you in some measure may be their hosts and may make them in some degree your personal guests. In what fashion is this possible? An easy way, when you can afford it, is to give money; and of course this is important. But

something more is asked from you, namely, sympathy and interest and practical co-operation. Some may find time to read to patients, or to write letters for them, or to sing to them, or to play to them. And everybody, or nearly everybody, can spare gramophone records, or books, or magazines, or journals, and may thus help both to relieve the monotony of hospital hours and to convey a message of brotherhood to sick folk. I suppose that each of us in his daily affairs frequently passes a hospital; ought we not occasionally to put to ourselves the question, What in the shape of personal service and self-denial am I doing for these my sad and anxious hospital guests?

I am not going to say anything about doctors and nurses as hospital hosts, although the part they play in this respect is necessarily an important and intimate one. I must, however, remind you that it is the hospitals which train and make efficient our doctors and nurses, and that through these the beneficial influence of hospitals is extended to the whole community. No one in the hour of sickness stands outside this benediction.

My appeal to you, however, is not as debtors to the hospitals (though this indeed you are) but as hosts and helpers and sympathizers, anxious to give voluntary personal service in the cause of the sick. And such service is twice blessed. Indeed, it may fairly be claimed that our hospitals have a social educational value in helping to keep alive in the public conscience the emotions of pity and sympathy and mutual helpfulness; it is he who loveth best that prayeth best.

It is sometimes urged that our hospitals should be supported from the rates or taxes, and that the voluntary managers should be replaced by paid officials. I ask you not to sympathize with this proposal. It is the spirit of voluntary service which, on the human side, makes our hospitals what they are. In management it secures elasticity, flexibility, adaptability; and it opens the door to all those who desire that our sick and suffering brethren shall in their hour of trial realize that there

are those who do not forget them. With State-supported and State-controlled hospitals we should have, no doubt, admirable reports and records and statistics, all duly sealed and stamped and neatly tied with red tape, but the spirit and life of our voluntary hospitals as we know them to-day would have disappeared. Take a single example: An enterprising newspaper proposes to bring the pleasures of broadcasting to the bedside of each hospital patient; promptly the money is subscribed; the managers welcome the proposal; and in a few months the thing is done, and done so quietly that many persons even to-day do not know that it has been done. Had a Government department been concerned, cannot you picture the elaborate inquiries, the official minutes, the multiplied reports that would probably have spread delay to that remote date on which by the speed of some public body Waterloo Bridge will be rebuilt?

No; the charm, the attractiveness, the human note, the social values of our British hospital system are due largely to the fact that it rests on a voluntary basis, and that it invites, without any element of compulsion, the sympathetic co-operation of every member of the community.

Now I must say something about doctors. But not of doctors in their individual professional relations, for of these you have direct opportunities for judgment. Further, were I to praise doctors I might reasonably be termed a prejudiced witness, while if I dispraised them (and this I certainly will not do) you might well doubt my sincerity. What I am going to say then is to be limited to the influence of doctors in the prevention of disease and in the promotion of the public health.

Let me, however, first remind you that success in these two enterprises does not depend entirely on the medical profession. On the contrary, it depends in a considerable measure on public opinion and on the individual citizen. Pure air, pure water, pure food, an adequate amount of sunlight, good housing conditions, cleanliness, personal, domestic and civic, sensible habits of eating and

drinking, and opportunities for healthy recreation, are all no doubt important factors in the promotion and preservation of individual and national health. But the supply and cultivation of these health-giving agencies depends on economic, political and personal decisions, and over these doctors have no more direct control than have any other citizens. If a community tolerates policies and conditions which make not for health but for disease, or if an individual follows foolish or vicious habits, the responsibility for the consequences rests, not on the doctors, but on the community or the individual directly concerned.

The medical profession may and does preach the gospel of health, but it rests with economists and politicians and local health authorities to apply the teaching, and these in turn depend on an enlightened public opinion and the pressure of the individual citizen's convictions and votes. As a result of quiet medical influence exercised over some years we have now a Ministry of Health in this country, and if the doctors' suggestions are accepted, forthcoming legislation will give to each local community a local health committee, whose business it will be to co-ordinate and to make effective all the agencies competent to promote the health of the people. Undoubtedly, a great deal of existing disease could be prevented if the country were willing to pay the appropriate price, and this price would have to be paid, partly in money, but partly also in a reform of certain individual and national habits. On this point my suggestion in a word is, that the health of the community is a responsibility which is shared by all the citizens, and not merely by those who belong to the medical profession. When public opinion fully appreciates and values even the economic importance of the common health, many hindrances and obstacles and vested interests will be compelled promptly to give way to the inevitable pressure.

Now if we look back some few years we shall see that there have been great gains, though this is no reason for rest and content and for a little folding of the hands to

sleep. There are probably in this congregation many to whom the terms cholera and typhus fever are mere names, and yet these names sixty or seventy years ago were sources of terror, and were widely dreaded even in this fair land of England. In the middle of last century cholera in two outbreaks killed more than 100,000 persons, and so recently as 1872 more than 3,000 persons died of typhus in a single year. To-day these two diseases have practically disappeared from the bills of mortality; and small-pox and enteric fever, which once were rife, are now quite exceptional experiences.

I do not want to suggest that these and like results are to be placed entirely to the credit of the doctors. On the contrary, I am anxious to insist that they are due to the combination of scientific knowledge with wise legislation and efficient administration, and to the gradual recognition by public opinion that it is only by such a combination that the community can be protected from the disasters of epidemic and contagious diseases. It is an educated and earnest public opinion that must provide the driving force necessary to secure a healthy nation, and to make effective the sanitary conditions and habits on which both the checking of disease and the establishment of vigorous health ultimately depend.

I name now two other widespread benefits which medicine has given to the community, and here the doctors have almost the full credit. One of these is the discovery and introduction of anæsthetics, such as chloroform and ether, by which a person may safely be put into so profound a sleep that even a severe surgical operation causes him no suffering. The experience to-day is commonplace and excites no wonder. Yet when chloroform was first introduced some eighty years ago there were doleful people who said that to prevent pain in this fashion was wickedly to defy a divine curse that properly fell upon the human race when Adam and Eve ate forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden; and the text, "in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children," was quoted in opposition to an attempt to relieve maternal suffering in woman's hour of need. Again, we have

nowadays agents which locally applied prevent the pain of an operation and yet leave the patient fully conscious, and everyone who has had a tooth painlessly extracted under the influence of cocaine or some similar drug owes a debt of gratitude to the chemists and the doctors who made local anæsthesia possible.

The second illustration I select of the boons given to humanity by the medical profession is antiseptic surgery—the method which has freed surgical operations from the dread of fatal blood-poisoning and has made the healing of wounds a clean and ready process. This is certainly one of the greatest material benefits ever conferred on mankind; it has in all parts of the world prevented an incalculable amount of suffering and has saved lives that no counting may number. And this great contribution to the relief of man's estate is the result of the study and thought and patience and perseverance of a doctor working quietly some fifty years ago in the wards of a Glasgow hospital; and now all mankind is his debtor. The name of Joseph Lister is recognized throughout the world as one of the greatest of those who have lightened the burden of human suffering and have brought great gifts to mankind.

Perhaps some of you may remark that there is another side to the picture. You may say, and quite rightly, that cancer exists and increases; that tubercle, though a diminishing disease, still slays every year its tens of thousands; that every now and again influenza sweeps through the land and produces much illness and many deaths; and that such diseases as scarlet fever and measles and diphtheria are very far from being prevented. In all these respects you may quite truthfully urge that doctors and preventive medicine can show but little success. I am afraid that some persons even go further and conclude that these failures show the doctors to be a stupid and incompetent company. On the other hand, I venture to propose that the explanation is, not that doctors are more stupid than their neighbours, but that the problems with which they have to deal are particularly difficult. In any event, it is true that in hospitals,

in scientific laboratories, in quiet studies, in anxious discussions, doctors are continuously striving to find out the nature and causes of disease and the methods by which diseases may be prevented or cured. It is work which demands unfailing patience, and it brings to the workers many bitter disappointments. Yet knowledge gradually grows, and what has been accomplished justifies the confidence and expectation that still greater things will be attained. The workers—I do not say the talkers—will yet come to larger and larger victories, for their faces are set ever towards the light and their one desire is to find and to make manifest the truth.

I must remind you, too, that according to well-established tradition, no doctor who discovers any truth or practice that will help to prevent or cure disease would think of using this knowledge for his own selfish aggrandisement. It is his pride as well as his duty to give to all his medical colleagues the truth he has learned, so that patients everywhere may have the benefit of the latest discovery and knowledge. The practice of secrecy for the purpose of making money receives no countenance within the ranks of the medical profession.

In the meantime, with such limited knowledge and resources as we possess, the practical work of preventing disease goes on. At our ports medical officers guard the country against invasion by plague and small-pox and other infectious diseases; our local medical officers of health are alert to recognize and to suppress the beginnings of epidemics and to promote health in the street and in the home; our school medical officers endeavour to detect and to rectify in early days those bodily defects which hinder happiness and education; factory and industrial surgeons strive for conditions favourable to the health of the workers; and the doctors who are your friends and your neighbours all take their part in the fight against disease and in the promotion of health. In different ways all these groups of doctors are working towards one and the same end, and their fitness for the task owes its first origin and inspiration to the training and education they receive in the medical schools

and the hospitals. To support the hospitals, therefore, is not only to aid sick folk, though this indeed is a happy service ; it is also to take a share in the promotion of the national health and welfare. You may, if you will, by unconcern or by opposition or by unbelief, help to hinder the success of this crusade against preventable disease ; on the other hand, you may forward it by interest, by confidence and by hopefulness. What is to be desired is the co-operation with scientific knowledge of popular interest, of practical common sense, and of individual effort, and then some day, sooner or later, ourselves or our successors "will build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land."

The immediate claim of to-day is that we shall give our attention and our practical goodwill to those appealing institutions where the sick and suffering find skilled help and succour, and where is gained a knowledge of disease that serves to bring health and healing into all our homes.

